



## Family Engagement Insider

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# Reimagine Family Engagement for the Opportunities Available Outside the School

## Out-of-School Enrichment Experiences Build Upon the School Day

The hours after the school bell rings and during students' summer break are times of enormous opportunity for students to learn and grow in new ways. By participating in community programs and extended learning opportunities outside of school, kids can:

- Discover new interests
- Engage in hands-on projects in fields like science, technology, engineering, and math
- Develop their communication, teamwork, and leadership skills alongside supportive mentors

The opportunities for learning that happen out of school go by various names: *extended learning; complementary learning; connected learning; learning ecology; and anywhere, anytime learning*. All of these terms describe the range of expanded educational resources and spaces — including after-school programs, summer learning experiences, and visits to cultural institutions — that enrich students' personal development and complement formal classroom instruction.

Beyond supporting students during the school day, teachers and school staff can play an important role in family engagement by actively connecting families to community resources and extended learning opportunities.

**80%** of students' time is spent outside of school

### Benefits of Out-of-School Learning

Consistent access to out-of-school enrichment activities — such as participating in sports, the arts, and summer camps and visiting libraries, zoos, parks, and museums — has a variety of benefits, including (Lopez & Caspe, 2014; Peterson, 2019):

- Promoting student success and college and career readiness
- Building youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness
- Fostering partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties
- Engaging families in their children's learning in meaningful ways

### By the Numbers

The **\$410,733,965 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding** that Delaware received may be used for crucial summer, after-school, and other extended learning and enrichment programs in an effort to advance equity for students hit hardest by the pandemic.

"We have an opportunity now to really reimagine what education can be, how we partner with like-minded organizations that offer up opportunities for our students and our families." — U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona

In Delaware, **9 out of 10 families** agree that out-of-school enrichment opportunities benefit children's social, emotional, and cognitive development and help keep them safe (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

Only **1 in 5 children** in Delaware have the ability to participate in enrichment programs due to a lack of programs and resources (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

## Not All Students Have Equal Access to Extended Learning Opportunities

**6,000 hours difference by 6th grade.** Learning time is a resource that is unequally distributed, and disadvantaged students suffer the consequences. While middle class children generally learn to read, create, persist, and problem-solve at home and through after-school and summer experiences, parents stressed by poverty are far less likely to be able to ensure those opportunities for their children (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010). In fact, by 6th grade, children from higher income households typically have access to 6,000 more hours of extended learning, compared to their peers from low-income households.

**Promote equity by connecting with families.** To mitigate the inequities that exist for students in poverty, classroom teachers, student support teams, and community partners must join forces with families to provide students with consistent access to an array of high-quality extended learning opportunities. For instance, school and community partners can discuss out-of-school learning opportunities with families through a variety of forums:

- Community partner meetings
- Parent-teacher conferences
- School open house events
- Individualized education program (IEP) meetings
- Family Resource Centers
- School bulletin boards
- School newsletter
- School website
- Facebook and Twitter

**CONSIDER:** What can your school do to connect families to community resources and extended learning opportunities?

## Expanded Learning Opportunities Should Act as a Bridge Between Home, Community, and School

Families who lack information about the education system or whose level of engagement is otherwise limited during regular school hours often rely on after-school and summer learning programs to learn about their child's strengths and interests. The more families know and understand what motivates their child and what they enjoy learning, the more families are able to explore and reinforce their child's interests.

Parent Advisory Council and other parent organizations can serve as platforms through which families, schools, and community partners come together to improve access to extended learning opportunities for all students. This ensures that families have a voice in the programs available in their community, including being engaged as volunteers and mentors.

Teachers, counselors, and student support teams can ask families what they value in out-of-school programs and collaboratively discuss the high-quality activities that are available to students in your school community (such as those listed in the Examples of Out-of-School Learning section).

## Examples of Out-of-School Learning

In a high-quality expanded learning experience, youth engage in a wide variety of activities, including the following (Peterson, 2019):

- Writing and acting in the performing arts with local community theatre members
- Learning real-life communication skills by taking a stand on a debate team
- Mastering the strategy of chess
- Exploring engineering in a robotics club
- Reading, writing, and illustrating books with a local artist or photographer
- Testing water quality to improve local natural resources with an environmentalist volunteer
- Measuring and using math to design buildings and bridges with local engineers, architects, and employers
- Creating digital games with a graphic designer (either online or in person)
- Composing music with a musician (either online or in person)
- Apprenticing with a master craftsman

- Teaching younger students in libraries
- Serving as a docent in local museums
- Gardening in the school or community garden and learning to cook their produce
- Getting more fit, eating healthy snacks, and learning about lifetime sports
- Earning high school credit for graduation or preparing for college through partnerships with schools, colleges, employers, libraries, and museums

## References

Afterschool Alliance (n.d.) *Afterschool in Delaware*. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state=DE>

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Weiss, H., Lopez, E., & Rosenberg, H. (2010). *Beyond random acts: Family, school, and community engagement as an integral part of education reform*. National Policy Forum for Family, School, & Community Engagement: Harvard Family Research Project. [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-6-000-Hour-Learning-Gap-by-ExpandED-Schools\\_fig2\\_234687228](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-6-000-Hour-Learning-Gap-by-ExpandED-Schools_fig2_234687228)